



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS: "BRICS II-2015: Institutionalization & Macau ("BRICS II-2015")**

**The Social and Cultural Research Institute of Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) with  
MAPEAL**

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- Distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

I bring you greetings from my country South Africa, and from the University of South Africa. It is a privilege and a pleasure to share some thoughts with you today, around co-operation and the institutionalization of BRICS and I touch more specifically, and at a strategic level, on possible strategies that can be employed in embedding or institutionalization of BRICS in higher education and by extension, in higher education institutions.

Global initiatives such as the *Millennium Development Goals*, *Education For All*, and the *United Nations Global Compact* have demonstrated that with the correct strategising, planning and *political will*, large scale initiatives can be successfully embedded into institutional functioning and operations at every level towards the desired outcomes. In my view, BRICS has already begun this process from a position of strength, having already demonstrated political will at the highest possible level – that of government.

It is now up to us to determine a way forward that will ensure an equitable sharing of our collective resources and capacities towards our desired outcomes.

In considering a strategy for the academic track, four “pillars” could be considered. I think we have already covered a lot of ground towards some of these, but together, they should ensure that we have identified and closed the gaps for efficient implementation. These include:

- The development of a BRICS Academic Track strategy and implementation plan (including the identification of targeted projects and project managers.) This would be at the MACRO, MESO and MICRO levels, that is, at the BRICS (collective), National and HEI levels. The three levels would be collectively synergistic, and yet nationally and individually aspirational in terms of national and institutional developmental goals.
- The identification of collaborative partners, networks and capacities - including human resources and infrastructure
- The development of databases that will include available capacity and resources, both human and facilities
- The development of a BRICS body and framework, within agreed responsibility holders, for monitoring evaluation – also at MACRO, MESO and MICRO levels.

A suggested implementation plan for higher education, of the BRICS countries, could include the following actions that are calculated to translate and inculcate the agreed areas of co-operation into institutional operations as follows (I am aware that many individual institutions, my own included, have already embarked on this process, but the suggestion is that in order for the BRICS academic track and agenda to achieve its intended impact, this should be a far more nationally inclusive project):

1. All national HEIs become signatories to the BRICS academic track goals and accept responsibility for reporting on progress. This would provide evidence of formal commitment to the BRICS initiative and signal the intention of nations to be active contributing partners.
2. Following on Council approval, participating institutions should sign institutional declarations or statements of support /commitment to participate. It might be useful to draft a generic BRICS statement for all participating institutions which could then inform specific institutional statements that would involve all of the institutional role players and stakeholders and would be reflected in the institutional strategy and other framing documents, thus ensuring buy-in.

3. Pertinent institutional policies could be revisited to make mention of identified BRICS Collaborative initiatives, for example, identified research disciplines and forms (including MIT) that are also consonant with national research and development imperatives.
4. Stakeholder engagement will assume increasing importance as participating stakeholders, both internal and external, public and private are identified and engaged to determine the level of support that they can offer the institution in its various BRICS-related projects and collaborations. It is likely that these will quite naturally be synergized with developmental initiatives at national levels and buy-in and support might be more readily forthcoming.
5. Institutions promote regular intellectual engagements with sister institutions and BRICS partner institutions, for example in the form of roundtable discussions and symposia and guests lectures. Guest lecturers could include specialists in the specific areas identified in the BRICS academic/research agenda and may be drawn from across the globe. HEIs could also consider instituting designated departments that would have overall responsibility for all matters relating to BRICS initiatives.
6. Third stream funding, partnerships and collaborations between BRICS members should be explored and intensified to leverage maximally the various resources and capacities of the collective. These are not insignificant and if the strategy and planning envisaged by this conference gained the anticipated traction and momentum, the progress and achievement on the identified academic objectives, would, I believe, be quite spectacular.

There are undoubtedly other initiatives that could be included in the framework but it is one that could feasibly serve as a basis for most higher education institutions, with limited disruption. As indicated above, The University of South Africa has already implemented a few of these suggestions to great effect, and we are looking forward to expanding and accelerating them in a planned and incremental manner.

In fact, I believe that Unisa offers an excellent example of the kinds of academic collaboration envisaged by BRICS.

Unisa's Research & Innovation Portfolio seeks to establish the University as one of the leading research institutions where innovative thinkers can flourish and innovative ideas are rewarded. Given its geographical reach nationally and on the continent, as well as its high public visibility, Unisa's success in research, innovation and postgraduate studies has a high potential to influence the future of

research in South Africa and on the continent. It is for this reason that the portfolio invests in and supports postgraduate studies, research, innovation and commercialisation projects and partnerships across the institution, collaborations within and across Unisa colleges, institutes and centres of excellence, research councils, other universities, private sector entities and government departments. In light of the strength and potential of the institution as well as the grand challenges identified by the Department of Science and Technology, the following five broad research niche areas were identified in 2009, which still relevant:

- a) Knowledge generation and human capital development in response to the needs of South Africa and the African continent
- b) The promotion of democracy, human rights and responsible citizenship
- c) Innovation and capacity building in science and technology
- d) Economic and environmental sustainability
- e) Open Distance Learning,

In order to achieve this Unisa has set itself some very specific goals, including:

**GOAL 1:** Develop and grow research capacity by having a critical mass of high quality researchers with a culture of research activity that focuses on excellence, innovation and leadership;

**GOAL 2:** Foster a supportive, enabling research environment;

**GOAL 3:** Contribute to South Africa's economic, social, cultural, environmental, scientific and technological well-being - this Goal aims to fulfill Unisa's commitment to serve causes which advance society and humanity. Developing research partnerships with the private sector, government at all levels, non-governmental organisations and community groups will extend the range of our research and diversify the funding base supporting our research. As a university we have an obligation to identify Intellectual Property arising from our research, and take appropriate steps to, where relevant, commercialise such IP for the benefit of South Africa;

**GOAL 4:** Become a leader in ODL research on the African continent and internationally - As the largest ODL institution in Africa, Unisa has a responsibility to provide leadership in this field; and,

**GOAL 5:** Enhance Master's and Doctoral Support - While Unisa does have a large postgraduate student body the pass rate for these students remain low. Attention need to be given to increasing the number of Master's and Doctoral candidate completions. Maintaining a high-quality and substantial graduate research program is essential for building our research capacity. Postgraduate students make major contributions to our research outputs and outcomes, and are integral to the development of

our academic staff and their disciplines. Our aim is to both increase cohort completion rates (in other words decrease drop-out rates) and to decrease completion times.

We believe that BRICS has a supporting role to play when it comes to achieving these goals. Given our histories and our developmental trajectories, BRICS countries share common research and innovation interests, particularly in high-impact areas such as Nano-technology, Energy, Water, etc. Due to similar economic growth rates and phases of development, the scientific and technological interests are very similar. Investments in Research & Innovation in our countries is growing sharply, but despite this, funding remains limited in relation to our developmental vision, and without collaboration, we are constrained in what can be achieved. Working together can ensure that efforts are not duplicated and that results can be shared more timeously. Therefore in this context, scientific collaborations among BRICS countries are very important. The Research & Innovation portfolio at UNISA has already initiated several strategic collaborations with BRICS countries, keeping the unfolding situation in our strategic planning for the future.

With Brazil, a Unisa delegation visited several Brazilian universities. The purpose of the visit was to establish strong collaborations with UNICAMP – the process has commenced. There are also efforts underway to establish a student exchange programme with the University of Sao Paulo. We hope to host our first group of Brazilian students before the end of the year as part of the Student Research and Innovation Showcase.

We have a very active Russian collaboration with our own Prof Lekala and his students visiting Russia, and a visit from Prof Vysotsky to Unisa as part of our BRICS symposium. Further collaborations with Russia are in the pipeline.

In 2014 a UNISA delegation visited several Indian Universities and Institutes, the purpose being to establish new partnerships and identify new opportunities for collaboration. UNISA also conducted joint international conferences at some of these places. The Ghandi Inspired Student Exchange Programme has also been running successfully for a number of years now and Unisa also hosts a large group of postdoctoral fellows from India.

With China, our student Caroline Tshiwela visited Prof Yanwei Ma's laboratory at the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing and this collaboration is rapidly developing. Here too Unisa is investigating further collaborations.

Currently Unisa holds annual BRICS symposia and we envisage that these will grow into a conference. We have successfully integrated the BRICS Academic track into Research and Innovation at Unisa in line with our own research agenda and national developmental priorities, and collaborations with our BRICS colleagues are set to grow exponentially.

I am sure that many other institutions could share equally exciting stories – and this is just the tip of the iceberg, as they say. If we move forward deliberately, incrementally and with shared vision, purpose and intent, I have no doubt that we will achieve the aims of the BRICS academic track and in so doing, contribute to the vision of the BRICS collaboration.

I thank you.